

The Vision of-the Cross

97

appeared in a Roman Court Circular at the time when Eusebius wrote.

But when did Eusebius write *The Life of Constantine*, from which we have taken this narrative ? Not until Constantine himself was dead, not, that is to say, until after 337, fully a quarter of a century after the event described. The date is important. In twenty-five years a story may be transfigured out of all knowledge through constant repetition by the narrator, to say nothing of the changes it suffers if it passes in active circulation from mouth to mouth. Has this been the fate of the story of the Vision of the Cross? *The Life of Constantine* was not the first volume of contemporary history published by Eusebius. He had already written a *History of the Church*, which he issued to the world in 326. What, then, had the author to say in that year about this marvellous vision ? Nothing. There is not a word about the flaming cross, or the coming of Christ to Constantine in a dream, or the fashioning of the Labarum. All Eusebius says, in his *History* of the conversion of Constantine, is that the Emperor " piously called to his aid the God of Heaven and his son Jesus Christ." It is a strange silence. If the heavenly cross had been seen by the whole army; if the current version of the story had been the same in 326 as it was in 337, it is at least difficult to understand why Eusebius omitted all mention of an event which must have been the talk of the whole Roman world and must have made the heart of every Christian exult. Such manifest signs from Heaven were scarcely so common in the open-